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AUTHOR Silvestri, Gary
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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the developments in teaching methods in China in the era of the post-Cultural Revolution, and explains how these methods grew out of educational experimentation during the Yenan period. The Yenan period followed the historic "long march," when Mao Tse-tung and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) established their base in Shensi province. At that time, a school was established characterized by political education, firm leadership, integration of theory with practice, and simplified curriculum. The basic method of teaching was the enlightenment method, an inquiry process involving initial questions and group discussion to develop answers. Many of these practices are now prevalent in Chinese schools. Political education stressing Maoist teachings is of primary importance and begins in the fourth grade. Schools are run by workers, revolutionary cadres, and local PLA Units. Curriculum is related to needs of individual communities. Productive labor is emphasized as well as book learning, a concept which helps produce a classless society. The teacher's authority is not absolute; traditional respect for teachers' intellectual superiority is no longer acceptable. This has created a need to re-educate teachers to have an ideological outlook consistent with Maoist tenets. Problems arising from this change include class discipline and blending Maoist thought into all lesson content. (Author/AV)

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POST CULTURAL REVOLUTION TEACHING METHODS

BY

Gary Silvestri

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PREFACE

To the casual observer of the China scene, it might well appear that China's educational reforms are a consequence of the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1969. However, many of the so-called "new born things" in Chinese education had their origins in the long period of revolutionary struggle preceeding the founding of The People's Republic of China; specifically the Yenan period, following the historic "long march", when Mao Tse-tung and The People's Liberation Army established their base in Shensi province.

The "Anti-Japanese Military and Political College", known to the Chinese as "Kang Ta", founded during this Yenan period, was based on principles which laid the groundwork for many of the educational reforms which were applied on a wide-scale basis to China's educational system during the Cultural Revolution.

This paper highlights the developments in teaching methods in the era of the post-Cultural Revolution and enables the reader to make the connection with educational experimentation during the earlier Yenan period, while at the same time alerting us to the fact that the "revolution in education" is an on-going process of development.

Dr. Eli Seifman
General Editor
Stony Brook AHA/FDP

"POST CULTURAL REVOLUTION TEACHING METHODS"

by

Gary Silvestri

Teaching methods in China have undergone great transition since the cultural revolution in the late 1960's. Poor and lower middle peasants now have a functional role in the schools due to the stress on the "three-in-one" combination in schools. New methods are stressed such as combining theory with practice, productive labor, open book exams, use of the "enlightenment method", and placing a major emphasis on political thought in courses. Many of these new ideas and methods are the by-product of an earlier period of educational experimentation in Yenan. This experimentation was epitomized by the Kang Ta type school.

The revolution in education is still in the process at present. It is perpetuated by the "two line struggle" that exists, and the campaigns to carry out "Struggle-Criticism-Transformation." This however causes problems for teachers and intellectuals who do not follow Mao Tsetung's educational line and are criticized. It also has effected the quality of education.

The various new methods of teaching have both good and bad points. It must be stressed that education is still in the experimental stages and can offer many new benefical teaching methods and techniques.

The revolution in education started with the reopening of schools closed down as a result of the hiatus caused by the Cultural Revolution. Chairman Mao's "March 7" (1968) directive set to the work of reopening the schools. "The army should give political and military training in the universities, middle schools, and higher classes at primary schools, stage by stage, group by group. It should help in reopening school classes, strengthening organization, setting up the leading bodies on the principle of the 'three-in-one' combination, and carrying out the task of 'struggle-criticism-transformation.'"[1] Some of the major ideas to take root with the reopening of schools were the primary emphasis on political training or thought, and the new role the proletariat or poor and lower middle peasants in education. No longer will the schools just be run by the teachers and the government. Now there is a "three-in-one combination," meaning a group consisting of workers, revolutionary cadres, and local People's Liberation Army Units. The major emphasis is the running of schools by the lower and middle peasants. This is stated in Chairman Mao's "May 7" directive. "In the countryside, schools and colleges should be managed by the poor and lower middle peasants - the most reliable ally of all the working class."[2] There are various reasons why importance is placed on the poor and lower middle peasants influence in schools. First it creates an "open door school." The "open door school" is linked to the local community by the community's participation and voice in it. In this manner the school

is more responsive to the local community's needs. An example of this responsiveness is when the local community is basically agricultural, this community would have a need to teach their children agriculture, or perhaps animal husbandry. The school would then place more importance in this area than perhaps in others. They may also teach the latest or newest techniques in animal husbandry. Thus there is an integral link between the school and the local community, each serving the others needs. This answers the question of "education for whom?" Education is for the people, to serve them."

The local areas also tie into the school with regards to productive labor. This follows the teaching of Mao. "Education must serve proletarian politics and be combined with productive labor."[3] Productive labor in the schools helps to foster a tie with the worker or the proletarian cause. It removes the negative connotation of doing work with one's hands, as compared to using just your head as intellectuals of the past might do. This helps to produce a classless society, a socialist society, and helps in the building of modern China. To frown upon doing work with one's hands is considered bourgeois, revisionist, and an incorrect political attitude. This attitude is considered feudal and bourgeois because it reflects a time in China's past when society was stratified into classes, and based on feudalism. These same feudal ideas can be seen in the teachings of Confucius. "Those who work with their minds govern, those who work with their hands are governed."[4] Thus the teachings of Confucius are criticized and repudiated for the same reason.

Productive labor also serves the purpose to "combine theory with practice." Instead of learning just book knowledge importance is placed on practical knowledge. This means using theory and practice together. Instead of just knowing theory students should be able to apply it, otherwise it's useless. "Teaching in the old school centered around textbooks and was divorced from politics, labor and reality. The cultural revolution and re-education by the poor and lower middle peasants has helped the teachers to realize that such a method produced nothing but book-worms."[5] So importance in schools is no longer placed just on book knowledge. Mao states this fact when he was referring to students: "While their main task is to study, they should also learn other things, that is to say, they should not only learn book knowledge, they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production, and military affairs. They should also criticize and repudiate the bourgeoisie."[6] New methods like "combining theory with practice," "productive labor," less stress on book knowledge, open schools, the prominence placed on political thought, almost all have a common background before the cultural revolution. This background is from educational experimentation carried on in Yenan (entire northwestern area of China under communist control from 1936 to the end of WWII). During this time China was resisting invasion by the Japanese. A school known as Kang Ta was set up. Kang Ta is really a shortened name for the Chinese People's Anti-Japanese Military and Political College. Kang means "to resist" or "anti" from "K'ang Jih" which means resist Japanese. Ta is an

abbreviation of "Ta Hsueh" meaning university or college. Ten characteristics of Kang Ta were:

1. Correct objectives: politics in command, Mao's Thought as guide for all activities; study and production go together.
2. Firm leadership: direct supervision by Mao Tsetung; strict adherence to his principles.
3. Good school spirit, characterized by unity of spirit, intense absorption in work, strict discipline, and vivaciousness. Political and military atmosphere dominant.
4. Political education as curriculum core. Mao's writings as basic teaching materials.
5. Integration of theory and practice
6. Simplified content. Fewer but more concentrated courses; elimination of non-essentials.
7. Shortened period of schooling; 6 to 8 months for completion of course.
8. Attractive and lively methods of learning; collective study, mutual assistance among students; group discussion as a method of learning; open book examination.
9. Teachers imbued with revolutionary spirit.
10. Self-reliance; thrift and economy in running the school.[7]

The stress on relating or combining theory with practice, the importance of political thought education, and the principle of "few but essential" courses thus reducing the length of schooling are all

prevalent in post cultural revolution schools. Other principles also used from Kang Ta were: teaching by example (teachers also served as an example), the use of models, and pictorial illustrations in lessons. The basic method of teaching was the "enlightenment method." This is opposed to the "injection method" in which information is told or book knowledge is crammed or injected into the students. The enlightenment method "begins with a discussion of the premises upon which a question is based, and then poses the question, breaking larger questions into smaller ones, establishing definite relationships among the questions, enabling the students, under the guidance of the teacher, to understand the whole problem from each of its aspects; from the process of the question's development, the rules and laws of governing its method are understood."[8] Making associations in teaching is another method, an example is relating current problems to past ones. Examinations were to be informal. They would be open book exams. Students could bring notes, reference books, and consult among themselves. In this way tests served two purposes, they promoted studies and acted as an evaluative instrument. The marking of tests were done by a few selected students. This saved the instructor time and would also result in a closer scrutiny of tests.

Many of the techniques and methods used in the Kang Ta school are presently in practice in Chinese schools. The primary importance of political education is an example, with the use of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tsetung. In primary education political studies is added as a course at the fourth grade. So the emphasis on political thought and ideological correctness is introduced at a very early

age. The importance is placed on putting politics in command of knowledge. Presently in Chinese schools lessons should be given with Mao Tsetung thought in command. In teaching history it should not be analyzed as it was in the past by Chinese historians. It should be viewed only in terms of class struggle and analyzed by using Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tsetung thought. How Mao Tsetung thought is combined in a lesson is shown in part of an example chemistry lesson.

In giving a lesson on "ignition and fire extinguishing," a chemistry teacher guided the students to study again and again Chairman Mao's teaching that "external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes." As a result of the reconstruction done by workers in our school in connection with the boiler for boiling drinking water, coal rocks are used instead of coal as fuel. Using this example, she asked the students: "Why can coal rocks burn? Why can't ordinary rocks burn under normal conditions?"

The students' reply was: "Because there are coal ingredients in the coal rocks. So they have the internal causes for catching fire, while ordinary rocks don't have them."

"Why then was it not possible to use coal rocks as fuel before reconstruction?" she asked again.

"That was because the question of external causes was not solved," replied the students. "The oven was too small,

so there wasn't enough draught and oxygen to make the coal rocks burn."[9]

Many other manifestations of the Kang Ta school are present in Chinese schools today "Experiments are now under way to complete primary school in five years, middle school in four to five years, and university in three years. Even with the shortened courses students acquire more practical and theoretical knowledge than in the past because superfluous subjects and redundant or useless teaching material have been discarded. More important, ideological education has been strengthened; book learning is closely combined with practical production, and theory with practice."[10] "In the past, examinations were planned like surprise attacks, and the questions asked were either obscure or designed to trap the students. Now 'open book' examinations have been introduced almost universally."[11]

The present methods used in revising education are all part of Mao Tsetung's educational line. The idea of linking education with the proletarian cause and proletarian politics, and others all conform with Mao's policy for revising education. This policy or educational line is closely linked to the idea of class struggle or the "two line struggle." Those who do not follow Mao's line are often labeled reactionaries, revisionists, and bourgeois. Liu Shao-chi is one of the highest officials attached for being a revisionist. It is said that "Liu Shao-chi and his followers, who usurped the leadership of the educational department, worked in opposition to Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line."[12] The two lines

are: those who are socialist minded and carry out the proletarian revolution vs. those who follow the road of capitalism, are bourgeois and revisionist. The idea of this struggle is to perpetuate the revolution in education and in other areas. To carry this out and revise education the schools are seen as the battleground between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. To fight this battle people must carry out "Struggle-Criticism-Transformation."

What are some of the implications of these new techniques that have evolved, and the importance of the revolution in education? The revolution calls for the use of all these new teaching techniques. To bring them about the political philosophy behind them, the teachers and intellectuals must be re-educated, remolded to have the "correct" ideological outlook. Mao states: "In the problem of transforming education it is the teachers who are the main problem."[13] As a result of this drive to fight bourgeois and elitist thought teacher positions have lost importance. To look up to a teacher because he is an intellectual or because he is your instructor is supporting an elitist notion. The idea that the teacher is an absolute authority is incorrect, and considered an idea 2,400 years old by Confucius, a reactionary thinker. Teachers can thus be criticized by their students. In Number One Primary School in Northwest Peking a fifth grade girl criticized her teacher for scolding students. "Are we children of Mao Tse-tung's time still supposed to be slaves to the old educational system's absolute authority of the teacher."[14] With these criticism campaigns, teachers are often afraid to teach. Old teachers are afraid that they may be criticized for not putting enough

politics in a lesson or having an incorrect ideological political stand. Those who stress too much knowledge are afraid of being accused of professionalism. The teacher must emphasize politics or "redness" and have less emphasis on the "expertness." "Teaching morale is low. The traditional respect and prestige accorded to Chinese teachers are now absent.... Teachers are afraid to assert their authority for fear of being accused of the revisionist practice of teacher domination. They hesitate to demand too much from students in the learning of subject matter because they do not want to expose themselves to the charge of stressing useless book knowledge. Discipline is virtually impossible when students have the right to attack teachers for anti-proletarian ideas and practices. These are not imaginary difficulties. The Party branch of a middle school in Liaoning province stressed the need for positive leadership to help teachers solve their problems."[15] Teachers also must try to inculcate Mao Tsetung thought in their lessons. To tie Mai Tsetung thought into lessons day to day can certainly be no easy task. There should be a note here with regard to the study of history. History should now be studied only in terms of class or economic struggle based on Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tsetung thought. Where is analytical and scholarly work when only one approach or viewpoint is allowed? These are the problems yet to be solved. The revolution in education has its fine points also. They are also as numerous and include, open book exams, enlightenment method, open discussion, combining theory and practice, etc. But education in China is still in the experimental stage, and there can be many more new and important innovations coming for China in the future.

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